

EVERYMAN AND HIS WOMAN

The old English poet would call it
the Autumn of their lives, adding

ten years and subtracting near-
ambition from this forgettable pair.

But they've simply paused, like travellers
on a dark road late at night

while strangers in passing cars assume
them to be local: Maureen has exchanged

that road for a private telephone; Philpot
accompanies her with elevated thoughts

unhampered, like the English, by a class
peg. His early vow to prevent that ugly

roll of fat sitting on the back of his neck
has made him more ambitious, stretched

his mind miles round retirement: suppose
for instance, his situation was different,

could he cope with it? Would he blow
it all by, say, forgetting his Swiss Bank

account number and be ruined? Or would he
write it down and be on Maureen's level

once again? This prolonged period of mental
massage confirmed there was no immediate

crisis in the lives of a woman voting Tory
for the first time and a man planning anew

to defeat cancer and the heart attack
as he had done younger enemies.